



Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was relieved to finally be at the Home of Cricket in Mirpur yesterday after more than a year due to his suspension from all forms of cricket. (Bottom) Left-handed batsman Tamim Iqbal, along with a number of national team players, came to the venue for fitness test. Tamim is expected to fly for Pakistan today to take part in the PSL playoffs.

PHOTO: BCB

‘Cricketers’ fitness satisfactory

SPORTS REPORTER



All eyes were on Shakib Al Hasan on the first day of the fitness test for the cricketers yesterday as the champion all-rounder returned to the home of cricket -- the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium -- after 376 days since being banned for one year for not reporting corrupt approaches from a bookie last year.

Players, divided into four groups, underwent the test where the first lot of twenty cricketers were supposed to give fitness test at 10:00am. Shakib reached the stadium at around 8.30am and roamed around the place where he had registered numerous records in the past.

Shakib, however, did not take part in the fitness test. The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) trainer Tushar Kanti Howlader informed that the BCB's physio Julian Calefatto wanted to assess the condition of the cricketer before taking the test.

"As Shakib returned after a long time, our physio Julian wanted to consult with him before taking the rest. He is expected to give the test within the next two days," Tushar told The Daily Star.

But according to sources, there was another reason behind that. The top-ranked ODI all-rounder, who returned a negative coronavirus test the other day, expressed his discomfort in taking the beep test with other players who were yet to undergo their coronavirus tests.

certificate.

When the issue was addressed to the BCB's cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan, the former skipper informed that the board has taken all safety measures while conducting the fitness test.

"We have to make sure health

mandatory fitness test and a total of seventy cricketers gave the test on the first day.

Eight players, including the likes of Hasanuzzaman (10.10), Irfan Hossain (10.10), Arafat Sunny jnr (10.1), Rubel Mia (10.2), Shubhashish Roy (9.8), Iftekhar Sajjad Rony (10.8), Sohag Gazi (9.4) and Avishek Mitra 10.6 failed the test as they could not achieve the eleven-point benchmark for the beep test.

Nihaduzzaman top-scored with 13.4 while Robiul Islam and Pinak Ghosh scored 13.

According to BCB's head of physical performance Nicholas Lee, majority of the players looked fit and they are heading towards gaining match fitness in the coming days.

"Apart from a handful, all the cricketers looked to be in good shape and in fact, it seems like the players focused on their fitness during the coronavirus-induced lockdown. There are no issues regarding national and high performance players in terms of fitness. I think we are in a transition from physical fitness towards match fitness and I am hopeful we will be able to get that by playing and by the time international cricket resumes in January hopefully," said Lee.



Shakib found himself under hot water after he attended inauguration of a super shop in the capital last Friday less than twelve hours since his return from the US, contrary to health safety guidelines of going into quarantine after returning from abroad, even if the returnee has a Covid-19 negative

safety of the players and we instructed everyone to follow those. We will take the coronavirus tests of all the prayers when we will create the bio-bubble, but before that we have ensured health safety for every cricketer," Akram said.

Apart from Shakib, the other cricketers did take part in the

Klopp, Guardiola happy with draw

AFP, London

Jurgen Klopp praised his "dangerous" Liverpool team after they missed the chance to return to the top of the Premier League following a 1-1 draw with Manchester City on Sunday.

The Liverpool boss fielded a fearsome-looking starting line-up at the Etihad featuring Sadio Mane, Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Diogo Jota.

A flying start from the champions was rewarded with Salah's 13th-minute penalty. Gabriel Jesus levelled for Pep Guardiola's men before Kevin De Bruyne failed to hit the target from the spot three minutes before half-time.

A share of the points between the sides that have combined to win the title for the past three seasons leaves Liverpool in third, just a point off the top, while City are five points behind with a game in hand.

"Super football game to be honest," Klopp told Sky Sports. "Two top teams ready for a massive fight -- energy levels of both teams incredible."

"We were really good and dangerous," he added. "We were ready to make little passes -- there were moments we played too many long balls. Time to time we just wanted to get rid of the ball."

Guardiola said the draw was a fair result. "It was tight," he said. "In the second half we had more clear chances but a draw is a fair result."

"It is not easy to defend against Liverpool, normally they have three in attack and now four."

Mumbai's fifth or Delhi's first?

REUTERS, Undated



Delhi Capitals returned as a vastly improved side to reach their first Indian Premier League (IPL) final but will need an extraordinary effort to upset Mumbai Indians on Tuesday after three unsuccessful attempts to beat the champions this season.

Mumbai, the tournament's most successful team, made the playoff with a match to spare and crushed Delhi in Thursday's qualifier to stay on course for a fifth IPL title.

Delhi had to overcome Sunrisers Hyderabad in Sunday's second qualifier to set up a summit clash with a side who beat them twice in the round-robin stage this season.

"Amazing, this is the best feeling ever," Delhi captain Shreyas Iyer said after Sunday's win.

"This has been a rollercoaster. A lot of ups and downs, we have stuck together like a family."

Against Hyderabad, Delhi showed they have the tactical flexibility to try new combinations, opening with Australian Marcus Stoinis and recalling Shimron Hetmyer in inspired moves that paid off richly.

"You can't have same set of routines. You have to keep chopping and changing," Iyer said.

"In the next game too, we have to play freely and



maintain our temperament."

Mumbai under the captaincy of Rohit Sharma have looked familiarly formidable, their explosive batting line-up complemented by a fiery bowling attack led by India's Jasprit Bumrah.

"Having such a versatile squad, it gives me the option of changing the batting order," Rohit said after securing a place in the Dubai final.

"At times, if I want to rotate the bowlers, I can do that as well. The guys do understand their roles."

"It's not easy if you're not batting in certain positions, but we made it clear right at the start of the tournament that this is how the team is going to play and the guys are happy with that."



TWO DECADES OF TEST CRICKET

Today marks the completion of two decades since Bangladesh first took the field to play their inaugural Test match against India at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in 2000. Led by Naimur Rahman, Bangladesh became only the second team after Zimbabwe to post over 400 runs in their inaugural Test. Aminul Islam became Bangladesh's first Test centurion and his 145 was the second-highest by any player in a country's inaugural Test after Charles Bannerman's unbeaten 165 in 1877. However, there have been more disappointments than achievements in the Tigers' track record in the longest format. Tests: 119, Won: 14, Lost: 89, Drawn: 16 matches, Winning percentage: 11.76.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

No excuses for frailties, says Zidane

REUTERS, Valencia



Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said his side could not hide behind the referee's decisions or their injury and illness woes after they stumbled to a 4-1 defeat at Valencia on Sunday.

Real conceded three penalties for the first time in their history, all of which were scored by Valencia's Carlos Soler, while Raphael Varane also scored an own goal, after Karim Benzema had given the champions the lead.

Zidane had to make do without a total of six players for Sunday's match after midfield anchor Casemiro and record signing Eden Hazard tested positive for COVID-19, but the coach said nothing excused their performance.

"We can look for one thousand excuses and everyone can find any

reason they want to explain this," Zidane said. "But we should not be looking for excuses, everyone in this squad is a Real Madrid player."

The coach criticised his side for reacting so badly to Soler cancelling

out Benzema's opener.

"We played well in the first half an hour but the game changed completely after they equalised. This has happened to us a number of times and I don't like it," he said.



Valencia forward Carlos Soler celebrates one of his three goals during an extraordinary 4-1 win over Real Madrid on Sunday. The 23-year-old missed a spot-kick before converting three more attempts to grab a rare treble of spot-kicks against Zinedine Zidane's men.

PHOTO: TWITTER

"We need to really analyse what is going wrong because any little thing can cause us lots of difficulties. Once we conceded the first goal we couldn't get back into the game. A lot of things went against us today."

Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, however, felt his side were unlucky.

"We were very motivated to turn the game around at halftime but I had to make a save as soon as the second half started and then we conceded two penalties," he said.

"I think (Valencia striker) Maxi Gomez fouled Marcelo but Maxi shouted louder and they gave a penalty. There was also a foul on Asensio, we were talking about that in the dressing room but you can't change anything in the dressing room."

"I don't know how to explain it, they didn't create too many chances but we had three penalties go against us and their second goal was very bad luck."